

**What is claimed is:**

1. A method for controlling a digital printer to print an indicium on a surface of a substrate, said surface comprising a fixed reserved clear area, a variable unprintable area and a printable area, said method comprising the steps of:
  - a) determining a digital representation of said indicium, said representation comprising a plurality of portions;
  - b) determining said variable unprintable area as a function of said dimensions of said substrate and characteristics of said printer;
  - c) determining a position in said printable area for said indicium to be printed;
  - d) determining if printing said indicium in said position will cause one or more of said portions to overlap said fixed reserved clear area, and if not, downloading said representation to said printer for printing in said first position; and if so
  - e) modifying said representation to shift portions in a predetermined manner in relation to each other so that none of said portions overlaps said fixed reserved clear area, and downloading said modified representation to said printer for printing in said position; whereby
  - f) said indicium can be printed by different types of printers on substrates having different dimensions without overlap of fixed reserved clear areas despite variation in unprintable areas.

2. A method as described in claim 1 wherein said indicium is a postal indicium evidencing payment of postage and said substrate comprises a mailpiece.

3. A method as described in claim 2 wherein said indicium comprises encrypted data which cannot be generated without knowledge of a secret encryption key to provide security against unauthorized generation of indicia.

4. A method as described in claim 3 wherein said portions comprise a first portion and a second portion.

5. A method as described in claim 4 wherein said first portion is normally positioned to the right of said reserved clear area and said second portion is normally positioned below said reserved clear area, and if said first portion overlaps said reserved clear area, said indicium is modified by shifting said first portion to said left of said reserved clear area.

6. A method as described in claim 4 wherein said first portion is normally positioned to said right of said reserved clear area and said second portion is normally positioned below said reserved clear area and said first portion, and if said first portion overlaps said reserved clear area, said indicium is modified by shifting said second portion to the left and shifting said first portion below said reserved clear area into an area vacated by said second portion..

7. A system for printing an indicium on a surface of a substrate, said surface comprising a fixed reserved clear area, comprising:

a) a digital printer; and

b) a data processing system controlling said printer, said data processing system being programmed to determine said variable unprintable area and said printable area as a function of the dimensions of said substrate and characteristics of said printer; and said data processing system being further programmed to:

b1) determine a digital representation of said indicium, said representation comprising a plurality of portions;

b2) determine a position for said indicium to be printed in said printable area;

b3) determine if printing said indicium in said position will cause one or more of said portions to overlap said fixed reserved clear area, and if not, downloading said representation to said printer for printing in said position; and if so

b4) modify said representation by shifting portions in a predetermined manner in relation to each other so that none of said portions overlaps said fixed reserved clear area, and downloading said modified representation to said printer for printing in said position; whereby

c) said system can comprise different types of printers and said indicium can be printed by said different types of printers on substrates having different dimensions without overlap of fixed reserved clear areas despite variation in unprintable areas.

8. A system as described in claim 7 wherein said indicium is a postal indicium evidencing payment of postage and said substrate comprises a mailpiece.

9. A system as described in claim 8 wherein said indicium comprises encrypted data which cannot be generated without knowledge of a secret encryption key to provide security against unauthorized generation of indicia.

10. A system as described in claim 9 wherein said portions comprise a first portion and a second portion.

11. A system as described in claim 10 wherein said first portion is normally positioned to the right of said reserved clear area and said second portion is normally positioned below said reserved clear area, and if said first portion overlaps said reserved clear area, said indicium is modified by shifting said first portion to the left of said reserved clear area.

12. A system as described in claim 10 wherein said first portion is normally positioned to the right of said reserved clear area and said second portion is normally positioned below said reserved clear area and said first portion, and if said first portion overlaps said reserved clear area, said indicium is modified by shifting said second portion to said left and shifting said first portion below said reserved clear area into an area vacated by said second portion..

13. A mailpiece having a modified indicium printed thereon, said mailpiece comprising a substrate having a surface for printing said indicium, said surface

comprising a fixed reserved clear area, a variable unprintable area and a printable area complementary to said unprintable area, said mailpiece being produced by a method comprising the steps of:

- a) determining a digital representation of said indicium in unmodified form, said representation comprising a plurality of portions;
- b) determining said variable unprintable area as a function of the dimensions of said substrate and characteristics of said printer;
- c) determining a position for said indicium to be printed in said unmodified form in said printable area;
- d) determining if printing said unmodified indicium in said position will cause one or more of said portions to overlap said fixed reserved clear area; and if so
- e) modifying said representation to shift said portions in a predetermined manner in relation to each other so that none of said portions overlaps said fixed reserved clear area, and downloading said modified representation to said printer for printing said modified indicium in said position; whereby
- f) said indicium can be printed by different types of printers on substrates having different dimensions without overlap of fixed reserved clear areas despite variation in unprintable areas.

14. A mailpiece as described in claim 13 wherein said indicium is a postal indicium evidencing payment of postage and said substrate comprises a mailpiece.

15. A mailpiece as described in claim 14 wherein said indicium comprises encrypted data which cannot be generated without knowledge of a secret encryption key to provide security against unauthorized generation of indicia.

16. A mailpiece as described in claim 15 wherein said portions comprise a first portion and a second portion.

17. A mailpiece as described in claim 16 wherein said first portion is normally positioned to the right of said reserved clear area and said second portion is normally positioned below said reserved clear area, and if said first portion overlaps said reserved clear area, said indicium is modified by shifting said first portion to the left of said reserved clear area.

18. A mailpiece as described in claim 16 wherein said first portion is normally positioned to the right of said reserved clear area and said second portion is normally positioned below said reserved clear area and said first portion, and if said first portion overlaps said reserved clear area, said indicium is modified by shifting said second portion to said left and shifting said first portion below said reserved clear area into an area vacated by said second portion.